Coyne, Joseph Stirling
The man of many friends

PR
4508
C7M3

THE

MAN OF MANY FRIENDS.

An Original Comedy,

IN THREE ACTS.

BY

J. STIRLING COYNE,

AUTHOR OF

My Wife's Daughter," "Box and Cox Married and Settled," "Binks the Bagman," "How to Settle Accounts with your Laundress," "Did you ever send your Wife to Camberwell," "A Duel in the Dark," "Leo the Terrible," "Mrs. Bunbury's Spoons," "The Water Witches," "An Unprotected Female," "The Pas de Fascination," "The Hope of the Family," "Willikind and his Dinah," "The Old Chateau," "The Secret Agent," &c. &c.

THOMAS HAILES LACY,

WELLINGTON STREET, STRAND,

LONDON.

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First Performed at the Royal Haymarket Theatre, on Saturday, September 1st, 1855.

Characters.

PETER POPPLES (*the Man of Many Friends*)	Mr. Buckstone.
SAM SKRYMSHER (*the Old Friend*)	Mr. Compton.
THE HON. ARLINGTON VENEER (*the Elegant Friend*)	Mr. W. Farren.
CAPT. HAWKSHAW (*the Sporting Friend*)	Mr. Howe.
SIR JACOB MALMSEY (*the Dining Friend*)	Mr. Rogers.
MONTAGUE FLAPPER (*the Useful Friend*)	Mr. Clark.
JAMES	Mr. Weathersby.
ALPHONSE (*a Page*)	Master Carroll.
MRS. POPPLES (*the Wife of Your Friend*)	Miss Reynolds.
MRS. BEAMISH (*the Lively Friend*)	Miss Swanborough.
MRS. MAJOR MARTINGALE (*the Experienced Friend*)	Mrs. Poynter.
MISS NETTLEY (*the Satirical Friend*)	Miss A. Vining.
MISS DAW (*the Humble Friend*)	Mrs. Griffith.
MINCING	Miss Harvey.

Period—The Present Time.

Time in representation—Two Hours.

Costumes.

Popples.—*First Dress;* Green walking coat, white waistcoat and trousers, embroidered stockings, pumps, and white hat. *Second Dress;* Evening dress.

Hawkshaw.—Walking coat (black), white waistcoat, drab trousers, and white hat.

Skrymsher.—Fustian coat, red waistcoat, drab breeches and gaiters.

Flapper.—Brown walking coat, white waistcoat, figured trousers, and brown straw hat.

Veneer.—Black walking coat, white waistcoat, figured trousers, and black hat.

Malmsey.—Black dress suit and powdered wig.

Alphonse.—Page's dress.

Mrs. Popples.—*First Dress;* White muslin, trimmed with pink ribbons. *Second Dress;* Green silk dress with white lace flounces, and head dress.

Mrs. Beamish.—*First Dress;* Riding habit, hat and feather. *Second Dress;* Figured muslin.

Miss Nettley.—Figured satin dress, black lace mantle, and pink silk bonnet.

Miss Daw.—Scarlet plaid silk dress, white lace scarf, summer hat.

Mrs. Martingale.—Figured silk dress, black velvet scarf, and white bonnet.

Mincing.—Amber muslin dress, white apron, and lace cap.

THE MAN OF MANY FRIENDS.

ACT I.

SCENE.—*A fashionably furnished Apartment in Peter Popple's Villa at Norwood. The apartment is semi-circular at the upper end, with three large French windows opening on the ornamental grounds of the Villa; a breakfast table laid,* C. R.; *a lady's work table,* L. C.; *door,* L. 2 E.; *door of Popple's private room,* R. 2 E.; *a parrot on a perch at back.*

JAMES, *a footman, discovered asleep in an easy chair,* R. C.; *a newspaper lies at his feet. Enter* MINCING, L. D.

MINCING. James, James. Goodness, he's asleep! (*goes to him and calls loudly*) James!

JAMES. (*starting up*) Hey! what's the matter? Haw—(*yawning*)—Mincing, I believe I was obliverous.

MINCING. Obliverous! You were fast asleep, James.

JAMES. Really, the Parliament speeches is so dreadful heavy, and we were late at the hoprer last night.

MINCING. Yes, 'twas near two o'clock before mistress came home.

JAMES. *Aproposs*, as we say in the classics, Mincing, I was quite shocked at a report I heard.

MINCING. What report?

JAMES. Why, they say we're *parwenews*.

MINCING. *Parwenews!* Good gracious!

JAMES. Isn't it disgusting?

MINCING. Dreadful! But are you sure of this, James?

JAMES. Sure! Sir William Fluke's tiger pledged his honor it was a fact!

MINCING. Oh, if Sir William's tiger pledged his honor, there can be no doubt about it.

JAMES. I always suspected Mr. Popples since I see him eat green peas with his knife.

MINCING. Hush, here he comes. *Exit* JAMES, L. D.

Enter POPPLES *from room,* R., *he casts a glance at breakfast table, and looks at his watch.*

POP. Mistress not down yet, Mincing?

MINCING. Not yet, sir; but she'll be here presently.

Exit, L.

POP. Twelve o'clock, and not down to breakfast yet. A few months ago, when I was a happy doll maker, she used to rise with

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the lark—that is, not exactly with the lark, for larks don't rise in Mile End—but with the earliest sparrow in the neighbourhood; but ever since I came into this unlucky fortune, her poor little head has been turned, and nothing will serve but I must take a country villa, and give up my shop, and my dolls, and my old friends; and eat, drink, sleep, and dress as she pleases—because, as she says, it's fashionable. (MRS. POPPLES *is heard laughing outside.* L.) There she is at last, bless her dear merry laugh—it reminds me of the happy days when she wasn't afraid to be natural.

Enter MRS. POPPLES, L., *in an elegant morning costume, she is followed by* ALPHONSE.

MRS. P. Ah, my dear Poppy, how d'ye do? Coffee, Alphonse. (*sits at table*, L.) Been up long, my love?

POP. Since six o'clock, my dear. (*sits at table*, R.)

MRS. P. Six! Mercy on me, how have you contrived to amuse yourself all this time? (ALPHONSE, *who has poured out coffee, hands it to* MRS. POPPLES)

POP. A—hem—(*embarrassed*) For the first three hours, I watched the gold fish wagging their little tails in the glass globe; but the study of natural history becoming tiresome, I turned my attention to passing events, and counted the cabs and shays on the road.

MRS. P. Chaises, my love.

POP. Well, chay-zes—it's all the same, only you're so particular with your French, because you spent twelve months with your aunt, the schoolmistress, at Boulogne.

MRS. P. Ha, ha, ha, ha!—You're delightfully droll. You may go, Alphonse—ha, ha, ha! (ALPHONSE *is going*)

POP. And, Alphonse, here! (*returns to* C.) I don't want you!

Exit ALPHONSE, L.

MRS. P. Ha, ha, ha! (*changing her tone*) Popples, why will you expose yourself and me in this manner, before your domestics? You forget that our position in life is not now what it once was.

POP. I have a painful conviction of the fact. I'll take a cup of tea, my dear. (*she pours out tea*)

MRS. P. You ought to be the happiest man in existence. Blessed with an ample fortune——

POP. Which I don't know how to spend.

MRS. P. My love, I'll do that for you. You live in an elegant villa at Norwood——

POP. I don't like it—I was more comfortable at Mile End. There's too much fresh air going to waste here; it's a shameful expenditure of nature's property. (MRS. POPPLES *hands him a cup of tea*) Thank you, my dear.

MRS. P. Then you have a host of friends who are all sincerely attached to you.

POP. I know it; attached to me, and to my dinners; attached to my old wines, and my young—hem—(*aside*) I'll not say that—attached to my fortune, and like caterpillars they'll stick to the tree while there's a leaf left on it to devour.

Mrs. P. Ridiculous! (*he pours his tea from his cup into the slop basin*) Why don't you drink your tea from the cup, my dear?

Pop. Because I like it better from a bowl, my dear—you remember I always had my tea in a bowl when I made dolls at Mile End.

Mrs. P. I wish you would try and forget Mile End and your dolls, Mr. Popples.

Pop. That's impossible, Mrs. Popples—morally impossible. I can never forget the lovely creatures, with their soft flaxen hair curling round their little pink cheeks, and those beautiful blue eyes turning all manner of ways, that bring tears to mine when I think of them. Forget my dolls! No, Mrs. Popples, I trust I have the feelings of a doll maker too strong in my bosom, ever to forget the sweet smiling innocents that owed their existence to these hands.

Mrs. P. Well, my dear, I only hope you will suppress your feelings in the presence of our aristocratic friends, who are coming to spend a few days with us.

Pop. What more? Why the house will be full of them: they swarm to it like blue-bottles to a pastry cook's window in the dog days, and nearly drive me mad.

Mrs. P. How strangely tastes differ. For my part, I like the excitement of a house full of company—nature, I suppose, formed me for fashionable life.

Pop. Don't blame nature, Polly:—nature formed you for a good sensible little wife, but art has well nigh spoiled you. Nature never taught you to turn day-light into wax-light, to risk your money at a card table, or to lose your complexion at night in a ball room, and buy a fresh one in the morning at a perfumer's.

Mrs. P. (*laughing*) I protest, Popples, you wrong me about my complexion. As yet, I have not been obliged to mend my damaged charms by art like Lady Oldham, who spends the morning stuccoing and patching her face, and comes out in the evening like one of those repaired portraits one sees in a picture cleaner's window, where they write up, "Heads restored in this style."

Pop. Will you listen to me seriously, Mrs. Popples? (*rises*)

Mrs. P. (*rises*) Not to day, my dear—I want to be in my best spirits to meet my friends. Come, come, there's a dear Poppy. *Faisons la paix et embrassez moi mon cher.* (*kisses him*) You'll be amiable, won't you?

Pop. Well, I suppose I must—these are arguments that no man can resist. I'm sorry though they're coming to-day, for I expect a visitor who may not perhaps be the sort of person who——

Mrs. P. A visitor—who is it?

Pop. Our old friend Skrymsher—Sam Skrymsher from Lincolnshire.

Mrs. P. What, Skrymsher, that vulgar creature? Oh, Popples, how could you?—what will our friends say? Do contrive some plan to keep him out of the way—or, better, if you were to let him perceive that his visit is not agreeable, that he is *de trop*.

Pop. What, give the cold shoulder to Sam Skrymsher? No, Polly, I'll be hanged if I do that. I can't forget that he was my best friend when I wanted one, that he lent me three hundred

pounds when we married to set up in business, and that he used to send us up the fattest goose in Lincolnshire, and buy the biggest doll in my shop every Christmas. Don't ask me to cut such a man.

MRS. P. There, that's the way you perpetually oppose my wishes, it's plain you don't care for me. I have lost your affections, you don't love me any longer.

POP. My darling Polly, you know——

MRS. P. I know I am an unhappy woman. Reach me a chair. Oh! *Vous m'avez blessé au cœur—je sens que j'evanourai.*

POP. (*aside*) Now she's got to her French entrenchments she'll give me no quarter. (*places a chair*, C., *she sits*)

MRS. P. I feel I shall have one of my nervous attacks.

POP. Pray don't! my angel, don't! I can stand any attack from a woman but a nervous one. There now, don't go off, and I'll do whatever you wish. I'll look at Sam, when he comes, as fiercely as the lion looks at the unicorn in the royal arms. Will that do?

MRS. P. (*recovering, rises*) Thanks, my dear Poppy, you have taken a monstrous load from my heart.

SKRYMSHER, (*without*, L. D., *speaking very loud*) Sam Skrymsher is my name. I'm not ashamed of it, my good fellow!

POP. (*alarmed*) It's Sam—he's come!

MRS. P. Mind then how you receive him (POPPLES *goes up*, R., *despairingly*)

Enter SKRYMSHER, L. D., *he carries a large carpet bag*—JAMES *follows.*

SKRYM. I tell you it's all right—I don't want to be introduced.

JAMES. Allow me to take your carpet bag, sir.

SKRYM. (*looking at* JAMES) Well, mind how you handle it—(*gives him carpet bag*) there's a lot of eggs, and a couple of bottles of elder wine in it.

Exit JAMES, L.

(*sees* MRS. POPPLES) Hey!—bless me—surely it is—Mrs. Popples. Hey—how be you—and my friend Peter, hey? (*offers his hand*)

MRS. P. (*curtseying formally*) Mr. Popples is quite well, sir.

SKRYM. Hey, what's the matter? (*she turns off grandly, up* C.) What does it mean? (*mimicking her*) Mr. Popples is quite well, sir. Oh, I see. (*touches his forehead*) Poor woman—I always suspected it. (*sees* POPPLES, *who comes down*, R.) Ah, Peter, there you are. How be you, lad—purely, eh?

POP. My dear Sa—ahem. (*checked by a look from* MRS. POPPLES) Eh—ah! tolerably well, sir. (SKRYMSHER *stares at him in silent astonishment;* POPPLES, *unable to bear his looks, turns away to conceal his emotion—aside*) I'm a Turk; an unnatural hippopotamus.

SKRYM. "Sir!" "Mister!" I don't understand it.

MRS. P. (*looking off at back*) I declare some of our friends have arrived. I must go and receive them.

Exit hastily, L. D., *making signs to* POPPLES.

POP. (*rushes to* SKRYMSHER *and embraces him*) Skrymsher, my dear old friend! I'm so glad to see you. *(shakes his hand warmly)* Delighted, I am.

SKRYM. Hah! I like that, that's a hearty squeeze, man; it feels

like an honest welcome. But I thought at first you'd as lief I had not come. You looked so oddly at me.

Pop. Oh, ah, did I? Yes, it was Polly, hem—Mrs. Popples—that—ahem—never mind; I'm glad to see you looking so well. Nothing troubles you Sam.

Skrym. Nothing in the world. I'm hale and hearty. I sleep like a top and eat like an ostrich. By-the-bye, if you've any cold meat in the house I shouldn't mind giving you a specimen of my appetite. But dang it, Peter, what's the matter? You don't look so brisk as you used to. Any thing wrong? Come, what is it? I see you're not happy.

Pop. (R.) Well, I don't think I am; in fact, I suspect I'm very miserable. This sort of life don't suit me; a thousand times a day I wish that my uncle Jackson had left his fortune to somebody else. It's too much for me.

Skrym. (L.) Hoh! I knew it. Always said that the sweets of fortune would not agree with you. You're smothered in prosperity, Peter.

Pop. You don't know my sufferings, trying to get through the day doing nothing. I should have died in a month if I had not contrived a little amusement for myself, unknown to Mrs. P.

Skrym. Nothing irregular I hope, Peter?

Pop. Oh dear no! Polly reigns sole mistress of the little tenement inside my waistcoat—but there is a secret which I'll confide to you, Sam. You must know that Mrs. P. can't abide the sight of a doll, the very mention of one makes her ill, lest people, as she says, should suspect the fact of my having been a doll maker.

Skrym. Bah! a weak woman!

Pop. Yes; but the weakest of them are too strong for us, Sam.

Skrym. Perhaps so—can't say as I never speculated in the article. Go on.

Pop. Now in this respect I don't at all coincide with Mrs. P.—I'm an enthusiast in dolls. I've made them and lived among them all my life, and I don't mind confessing that my earliest love was for a splendid wax doll, with joints and turning eyes:—she was sent to Russia, Sam, and I afterwards married Polly, because she was like that doll.

Skrym. Well, but the secret?

Pop. I'm coming to it. I've had a notion for a long time, that a great improvement might be made in the construction of dolls, so as I had nothing better to do, I set to work in that room, (*points to* R.) of which I keep the key, and every hour that I can manage to steal away, I employ making a model doll that will astonish the world.

Skrym. You think so?

Pop. I'm certain of it. By a curious complication of springs and bellows, I can make it imitate the human voice, and already it calls "mamma," in the sweetest infantine tone you ever heard.

Skrym. Nonsense—you're losing your wits, Peter—you've run doll mad.

Pop. Ah, you think it's impossible, but come with me and you

shall judge for yourself; you shall see it, Sam—I'll show you how it works.

Skrym. Ay! well it must be curious. You always had a wonderful head—but don't you think a little refreshment might be agreeable at the same time?

Pop. Refreshment—ah, to be sure! I forgot that you have had a ride from town. (*aside*) A thought strikes me; I'll try to keep him in the doll room till my wife's fashionable company have left. I say. Skrymsher, as Mrs. P. don't dine till six, what do you say to an early bit of dinner to ourselves in my room, amongst the dolls, eh? snug and quiet, eh? nobody to disturb us—and a comfortable pipe afterwards, eh?

Skrym. The very thing I'd like; none of those fellows with a top dressing of flour upon their heads, standing behind our chairs.

Pop. Nothing of the kind—perfectly private, nobody is ever permitted to set foot in that room but myself. You go in, Sam, and I'll see about dinner. (*unlocks door*, R., *and puts* Skrymsher *in*) Don't meddle with my model doll though till I come. Now for a daring attack upon the larder. (*locks door and puts key in his pocket—looks off at back*) Good heavens! there's Captain Hawkshaw, my sporting friend! The sight of him throws me into a cold perspiration—he's always getting me to bet upon some horse that never starts. I should not, however, mind losing my money, if he hadn't a design upon my life. It was only last week he persuaded me to buy a splendid horse, that he told me was going a dead bargain—but, egad, it was I who was near being the dead bargain, for the brute tumbled on his nose, and pitched me over his head like an unpremediated harlequin into a quickset hedge. (*going*) Ah! here he is—I can't escape him!

Hawkshaw. (*speaking outside*, L.) Let the phæton wait, and shorten the bearing rein on the off horse.

Enter with Flapper, L. D.

Popples, how d'ye do? delighted to see you look in such splendid condition. Allow me to introduce to you my friend Flapper—Montague Flapper, of—of—I forgot the Park; never mind. (*aside to* Popples) You'll find him a devilish useful fellow—never happy but when employed by his friends.

Pop. Ah! ah! glad to see you, Flapper.

Flap. Thank you, Mr. Popples. My friend, Hawkshaw, knowing how anxious I was to make your acquaintance, drove me down.

Hawk. Twenty minutes and fifteen seconds from Charing Cross in my phæton; not bad going that. By-the-bye, you haven't seen my pair of duns!

Pop. Your duns? no, where are they?

Hawk. In the phæton, at the door.

Pop. They stick pretty close to you. Do you owe them much?

Hawk. Owe them? Oh, you're in the wrong stall. They're none of your rascally creditors, but a pair of dun carriage horses. I brought them down on purpose to show them to you. They're the very things you want, Popples.

POP. No, no, I really have no occasion for them.

HAWK. Allow me to know better, my dear friend. You can't do without them.

Enter MRS. POPPLES, L.

Mrs. Popples will, I know, agree with me. Mrs. Popples, how d'ye do, how d'ye do. (FLAPPER *bows repeatedly*) My friend, Montague Flapper. (*she curtseys*) I want you to decide a little amicable dispute between my friend Popples, and me. I tell him he must have that beautiful pair of horses in my phæton, you know he wants them for your new carriage.

MRS. P. Certainly, certainly, I'm sure you want them, my love. (*crosses to* POPPLES, R.)

POP. I tell you I don't. I'll have nothing to do with them.

HAWK. Now don't be obstinate, my dear fellow, you know I'm your friend, and would not advise you to do anything that was not for your advantage. On second thoughts you had better take the phæton with the horses, it would be a thousand pities to separate them. You shall have the whole turn-out for five hundred guineas —say pounds to a friend—there.

MRS. P. Amazingly cheap.

FLAP. Quite a sacrifice.

HAWK. You'll be astonished at their performance if you'll jump on the box with me. I know you'll admire their paces.

POP. Thank you, but I can admire their paces from the window more at my ease.

HAWK. Oh, they're as quiet as lambs. I'll give you a lesson in handling the garters.

POP. The garters! There are ladies present, Captain.

HAWK. The ribbons I mean, Teach you to drive, my boy.

MRS. P. My dear Poppy, you should be exceedingly obliged to Captain Hawkshaw for the trouble he takes with you, every gentleman should learn to drive, and the sooner you break the ice the better.

POP. Break the ice and my neck at the same time.

MRS. P. Don't be a fool, Poppy, here's your hat. (*offers him his hat*) There's no danger, my love.

POP. But I tell you there is danger you're in a conspiracy to bring me to an untimely end.

MRS. P. (*puts on his hat*) It only requires a little nerve.

POP. You want to be a gay widow, Mrs. P.

HAWK. Come along, my dear fellow. *(takes his arm)*

FLAP. Allow me to assist you. (*takes* POPPLES' *arm on* R. *side)*

POP. Stop, (*disengaging himself*) Stop, give me just five minutes —only five minutes, to make my will. *Runs off*, L.

HAWK. But, my dear Popples—confound it—to treat a friend in this manner. I say, my dear fellow. *Exit hastily*, L.

FLAP. Shall I run after him and bring him back?

MRS. P. By no means, Mr. Flapper.

FLAP. (*aside*) I wish she had something for me to do, a skein of silk to wind, or a letter to carry to the post-office.

Enter JAMES, L., *to clear breakfast.*

MRS. P. James!

FLAP. James! *(in a loud voice)*

MRS. P. Take Frisk and Mignonne out on the lawn for an airing. The poor creatures have not been abroad to-day.

JAMES. Yes, madam. *Exit,* L., *with tea tray.*

FLAP. Allow me; I've quite a fancy for airing lap-dogs.

MRS. P. By no means. I could not think of troubling you, Mr. Flapper.

FLAP. Oh, pray don't mention it, none of my friends ever think of sparing me, when I can be useful. I'll take a run with them for half an-hour. Here Frisk, Mignonne, whew, whew!

Exit, L. C.

Enter MISS DAW, L. D.

MISS D. Mr. Ingot, the jeweller's man, has brought this, mem. *(gives* MRS. POPPLES *a miniature in a case)*

MRS. P. *(opening the case)* Ah! *Il a fait un joli ouvrage dans le meilleur gout.* It is beautifully executed, and the miniature; do you recognise it, Miss Daw? *(showing her the miniature)*

MISS D. Oh, mem, it's amazingly like you!

MRS. P Well, mind you don't breathe a syllable about it to any person.

MISS. D. I'll be dumb, mem.

MRS. P. By-the-bye, Miss Daw, if it be not trespassing too much on your leisure, will you have the kindness to cut the leaves of the new novel I got this morning?

MISS D. With the greatest pleasure, mem. *Exit,* L. D.

MRS. P. It was a charming idea to have my miniature painted to present to my dear little Poppy, on the anniversary of our wedding. He knows nothing of it, nor shall he until I place it in his hands to-morrow morning. He has his faults, to be sure, and I'm afraid his vulgar tastes will not be easily rooted out; but he's so kind and affectionate and lets me have so much of my own way, that I can't be angry with him, even when he abuses my friends *(she places the miniature in the drawer of the work table,* L.) There it will be safe till to-morrow.

Enter ALPHONSE, L. D., *announcing* "Mr. Arlington Veneer," *who enters,* L.; MRS. POPPLES *crosses to receive him. Exit* ALPHONSE, L.

MRS. P. (R.) Mr. Veneer, this is kind.

VENEER. (L.) You see, my dear Mrs. Popples, your invitation has drawn me to your little paradise.

MRS. P. And you have really forsaken the brilliant soirees of Belgravia to honor my poor circle here at Norwood.

VENEER. Nay, madam! the circle of which Mrs. Popples forms the centre, is that in which I would continually revolve.

MRS. P. Very pretty and complimentary. I permit you to make me these flattering speeches in the absence of the object of your idolatry.

VENEER. Madam, I swear——

MRS. P. Oh, fie! swear not; or, if you do, let it be by the bright eyes of the charming widow Beamish, whom people say you have persuaded to make a second pilgrimage to the hymenial altar.

VENEER. (*aside*) Jealous! there's no mistaking the symptoms. You surprise me beyond measure; no man's character is safe in these times. I certainly fluttered in the fascinating widow's meshes for three weeks; but I never had the remotest intention of becoming a matrimonial victim for her sake. Oh dear, no! Perhaps some forty years hence, when I have drained the wine from the cup of life, I may——

MRS. P. Generously offer to share the dregs with some fortunate woman.

VENEER. Well, positively, there is something in the idea of marriage, that shocks one's sense of freedom.

MRS. P. You think, perhaps, that love should be unfettered.

VENEER. Decidedly. Love, madam, is a beautiful bird of paradise while its wings are free; but clip its bright pinions and it becomes a vulgar barn-door fowl.

MRS. P. Yet I suspect the widow will find a way to check your flight and induce you to settle down quietly in the domestic nest.

VENEER. (*aside*) The widow again. The hint's too plain to be mistaken. My dear Mrs. Popples, there is but one woman in the world who could chain my roving fancy; one shrine upon which I should desire to offer the incense of my adoration. (*takes her hand*) On this snowy tablet would I imprint love's softest seal.

MRS. P. (*snatching away her hand*) Mr. Veneer, recollect to whom you address this language.

VENEER. I recollect only that you are the most cruel of women and I the most wretched of men. (*kneels*) Enchantress, at your feet I implore one pitying look—one tender word. (*aside*) I hope she will not leave me long in this agonising position.

MRS. P. Ha, ha, ha, ha! That attitude is really beautiful! There, don't move. I wish I could have you photographed in that interesting pose.

Enter FLAPPER *hastily*, L. C.

FLAP. (*down*, R.) Can I be of any assistance to you?

VENEER. (*jumping up—aside*) Confound it! She shan't make me lose my temper though. You may judge the effect it produced, Mrs. Popples, when the gentleman was discovered on his knees before the lady, in the manner I have endeavoured to show you.

MRS. P. Oh, I can perfectly imagine it from your admirable acting—you could not have done it better had you been yourself the suppliant—ha, ha, ha, ha!

FLAP. (*aside*) I don't see how I can be useful if they keep the joke to themselves.

MRS. P. Hark! more of our friends have arrived. (*crosses*, L.—*apart to* VENEER) Don't forget those charming speeches and that beautiful attitude—they'll answer for the fascinating widow;—I expect her here to-day, ha, ha, ha!

Exit, laughing, L. D.

VENEER. (*half aside*) Not so easily caught as I expected.

FLAP. I beg your pardon, I believe you spoke

VENEER. Well, sir?

FLAP. I thought there might be something I could do for you; can't I make myself useful?

VENEER. No,—stay—yes, you can confer a particular favour on me—by taking yourself off.

FLAP. Certainly, with the greatest pleasure—anything to oblige. (*going*, L.—*returns*) You're certain there's nothing else. (VENEER *makes an impatient gesture*) Oh, very well, only I fancied there might. *Exit*, L. D.

VENEER. A provoking coquette. Though she likes to teaze me, I'm certain I'm not indifferent to her. It's the way with women—they torment where they love most: she shan't however make me give up the chase—I'll change my treatment like the doctors, and try her with poetry. Poetry is the blow-pipe of love, it concentrates the flame and melts the toughest female hearts. (*takes a pocket book from his pocket and opens it*) I keep a variety of amatory effusions ready for an emergency. (*selects a paper from a number of others*) Now here's one that will exactly suit her; I'll leave it in the drawer of her work table, where she cannot fail to find it. (*opens the drawer, and perceiving the miniature, takes it out*) Hah! what's this?—a miniature of the dear little tyrant herself. Ah, you may smile, but take care—it may be my turn next. (*goes up*, C.)

Enter POPPLES, L., *carrying a tray, on which are a roast fowl, a cold tongue, a pot of porter, with plate, knives, forks, &c.*

POP. All right! (VENEER *sees him and hastily puts the miniature in his coat pocket*) I've secured a roast fowl and a cold tongue; committed petty larceny in my own larder—bribed Jem the groom to fetch me a pot of porter—and now if I can only smuggle them in without being detected by any of these fine folks—— (*crossing to* R., *puts tray on a chair while he unlocks* R. D., *takes tray up again, and is about going into room*, R.)

VENEER. (*coming down*, L.) How d'ye do, Popples?

POP. (*turns and stands confounded*) Hah! Bless me, Mr. Veneer, I didn't see you—excuse me not offering you my hand.

VENEER. Don't mention it, pray; I perceive they're both engaged.

POP. Yes, ha, ha, ha! the servants were so busy that—I thought I'd lend a helping hand; but you need not mention it to my wife.

VENEER. To your wife, certainly not.

POP. The fact is, I have a friend here quite private.

VENEER. A friend? I understand. Sly dog—but don't be alarmed. I'll keep your secret. (*aside*) And turn it to account with his wife. (*laughter and voices heard outside at back*, L. C.)

POP. Hist! some of our friends coming. I'll get away. (*aside*) Skrymsher must be nearly starved. *Exit*, R.

Enter MISS NETTLEY, C., *followed by* CAPTAIN HAWKSHAW, SIR JACOB MALMSEY, MISS DAW, *and* MRS. MAJOR MARTINGALE.

MRS. M. You shan't escape us, Miss Nettley—we won't quit you till you tell us.

VENEER. What is it?

HAWK. Only one of Miss Nettley's stories about our friend Popples.

VENEER. Oh, poor Popples!

SIR J. A well-meaning sort of a man though he don't know an *omelette soufflé* from a lobster salad.

HAWK. Nor a Clarence from a tax cart.

MRS. M. Nor a field piece from a field marshal.

MISS D. Pray, Miss Nettley, let us hear it.

MISS N. I vow I shan't, because I don't believe one word of it; and coming from me——

MRS. M. None of us will believe it, my dear.

MISS N. It's really a shame to spread such a ridiculous report. Mr. Popples is my particular friend.

MISS D. And mine.

HAWK. And mine.

MRS. M. And mine.

SIR J. And mine.

VENEER. And mine.

MISS N. Well, since we are all his friends we may take a friendly liberty with him in his absence. You must know, then, that until very recently our dear friend trod the humble walks of life——

HAWK. In stout bluchers and worsted stockings.

SIR J. And ate tough mutton without caper sauce.

MISS N. I'm told he was originally a tailor.

VENEER. Allow me to set you right on that point: he was a pawnbroker's clerk.

SIR J. No, no, I beg your pardon, his father was a fishmonger.

MISS N. And his son a tailor.

ALL. Ha, ha, ha!

HAWK. There I must differ with you: the father was an undertaker, and young Popples commenced life as a mute. (*all laugh*)

VENEER. Allow me to say you are all wrong. It's well known he was——

MISS. N. A tailor.
SIR. J. His father was a——
HAWK. An undertaker.
VENEER. A pawnbroker's clerk.
} (*speaking together*)

While they are loud in contention, MRS. POPPLES *enters,* L.; MISS NETTLEY *perceives her before she enters, and lays her fingers on her lips significantly.*

MISS N. Hush. Hah! my dear Mrs. Popples, we were this moment wishing for you—such a delicious jest of Sir Jacob Malmsey's!

SIR. J. Of mine?

HAWK. Sir Jacob, you know, would rather lose his friend than his joke.

SIR. J. Well, I don't know that I might not be right sometimes.

MRS. P. Oh'fie! Sir Jacob, do you value your friends so lightly? If we had no friendship, what would this world be?

Miss M. Miserable!
Mrs. M. Horrid!
Hawk. Dismal!
Miss D. Shocking!
Veneer. Very. (Mrs. Beamish *is heard laughing outside*, c. l.)

Mrs. P. Hah! there's my charming friend, Mrs. Beamish; I hear her merry laugh ringing on the lawn.

Miss N. Oh, yes; there's no mistaking the lively widow's bell. What delightfully boisterous spirits she enjoys, since she left off her weeds.

Mrs. P. For heaven's sake look at her equipage!

Mrs. Beamish *enters*, c. *back in a wheeled garden chair drawn by* Flapper—*she is dressed in a riding costume.*

Mrs. B. (*speaking as they enter*) Now then, Flapper, mind you don't run against the flower pots: so, so, that will do. (*she jumps out of the chair*) Thank you. How d'ye do—here I am—how d'ye like my equipage, Mrs. Popples?

Mrs. P. Delightfully eccentric! And so you have brought Mr. Flapper under the female yoke.

Flap. Yes, I've been trying to make myself useful—(*out of breath*) doing duty for a donkey.

Veneer. Allow me to compliment you, sir, on the manner in which the representative of the great original has acquitted himself.

Mrs. B. Oh, 'twas capital fun! I left my horse at the gate, and ordered Flapper to draw me in the garden chair, and make a triumphal entry amongst you. You're not tired, Flapper? (*he wipes his forehead*) Why, I'm nothing of a weight—light as a cork.

Flap. Then I'd no idea that drawing a cork was such warm work.

Mrs. P. Mr. Veneer, where are your eyes? Cannot you see your friends? Mrs. Beamish, you know Mr. Veneer?

Mrs. B. Oh, yes! I think we were acquainted last week.

Veneer. (*crosses to* Mrs. Beamish) A thousand pardons for my inattention. (*apart to* Mrs. Beamish, l.) This is an unexpected felicity. (*apart to* Mrs. Popples *on the other side*) Cruel woman! (*apart to* Mrs. Beamish) Never saw you look so killing! (*apart to* Mrs. Popples) To consign me to this purgatory. (*aside*) How the deuce am I to play my cards between them?

Mrs. B. Ah, you deceitful truant! I vow I ought not to speak to you, but I'm by nature soft and forgiving. Give me your arm, you wretch, and tell me what you have been doing these last six days. (*takes his arm*)

Veneer. (*aside*) Hooked by Jove, and no rescue! (*goes up* c. *with* Mrs. Beamish)

Mrs. P. (*aside*) Ha, ha, ha! Now she has got him she'll hold him fast.

Enter Popples, *from* r. *room, he has on his head a workman's brown paper cap.*

Pop. (*aside*) I left Skrymsher smoking his pipe, and now I'm

come to show myself amongst my wife's company. I must not get too near them though, as there may be a flavour of tobacco about me.

MRS. P. (*crosses to him—apart to* POPPLES) Popples, Popples, what have you got on your head?

POP. My head, what? (*she snatches off his cap and gives it to him—he thrusts it into his pocket*) Bless me! I forgot—one don't know where one's head is.

MRS. P. (*apart to* POPPLES) What have you done with Skrymsher?

POP. (*apart to* MRS. POPPLES) Oh, I've secured him, he won't trouble you, he's all right.

MRS. P. (*apart*) Thank heaven. The bare idea of that horrid vulgar man appearing amongst our friends makes my blood run cold.

Enter SKRYMSHER, *from* R. *room; his waistcoat open, he carries a pewter pot in one hand, and a long clay pipe in the other.*

MRS. P. (*perceiving him*) Oh, Popples, he is here! (*sinks into a chair—*POPPLES *hastily retreats up the stage to* L.; *where he appears to be deeply engaged examining pictures in a portfolio, at table,* L.) We are destroyed!

SKRYM. Popples, where have you sneaked to? You know I like a friend to talk to while I'm smoking my weed. Hey, dang my buttons, here's a heap of fine folk! (*the* GUESTS *come down and stare at him with impudent curiosity*)

VENEER. Good heavens, what is it?

SKRYM. Hope no offence, ladies and gents. I was looking for my friend, Popples. Peter, where are you? Here's your very good health all round. (*drinks and claps the pot of porter on table*) That's not a bad tap. My name is Skrymsher!

HAWK. Skrymsher!

SKRYM. Yes, sir, Skrymsher is my name. Sam Skrymsher, from Great Grimsby, Lincolnshire, at your sarvus!

HAWK. Oh, from Lincolnshire,—the paradise of geese!

SKRYM. Geese, doomplins, and other combustibles!

MRS. B. (*apart to* GUESTS) What an original creature. A perfect Arcadian.

VENEER. (*apart to* GUESTS) Neat as imported. He only wants a crook, for you see he is already provided with his pipe.

SKRYM. (*aside*) How these folks do stare at me.

HAWK. I beg pardon, Skrymsher, but allow me to ask, who grooms you?

SKRYM. (*amazed*) Grooms me? (GUESTS *titter—aside*) Danged if they bean't laughing at I.

VENEER. And if it be not an impertinent question—how are beans down in your parts?

SKRYM. Well, I believe they are pratty fairish, but like the fine chaps up in your parts, they're sadly in want of thrashing. (*all laugh*)

HAWK. I'll take four to one on the Arcadian.

POP. Ah, ha, ha!

SKRYM. (*perceiving* POPPLES) Hollo! there's Peter. What are

you doing there, Peter? (*crosses to* POPPLES, *who comes down*, L. *with a drawing in his hand*) Pictures! Ah, you should see my picture over the fire-place at home; none of your wishy washy things, but good solid painting—no sparing of colour—plenty of red, and blue, and green. And then for size—why I'm dashed if it wouldn't make a dozen such as that.

MRS. P. (*aside*) His vulgarity petrifies me!

SKRYM. (*apart to* POPPLES) Dang me, Peter, if your friends here bean't the most ill-mannered set o' people I ever met. They should come down to Great Grimsby to learn good manners like——

POP. (*apart to* SKRYMSHER) Hush! Come this way, Sam, I want to speak to you. (*takes him to table*, L.)

MRS. B. (*who has been playing with the parrot, screams*) Oh, dear! the parrot has bitten me! (*coming down*, L.)

MRS. P. The horrid bird! How your finger bleeds. Shall I get you some lint and Friar's Balsam?

FLAP. Or the nap of a hat and a handful of cobwebs?

MRS. B. Oh dear no—it is nothing—a mere scratch!

VENEER. At least let me tie my handkerchief round your finger. (*in taking his handkerchief from his pocket he draws out the miniature, which falls on the floor, he ties the handkerchief round* MRS. BEAMISH'S *hand*)

MRS. B. You compassionate angel! (FLAPPER *picks up the miniature unperceived*)

FLAP. (*aside*) Hey! what's this Veneer has dropped?

MRS. P. Who's for a stroll in the garden? I have such a splendid Mexican cactus in full bloom—you must come and see it.

MRS. B. (*and other* GUESTS) We'll all go. (MRS. BEAMISH *takes* VENEER'S *arm, and with* MRS. POPPLES *goes up*, C.)

MRS. M. Shall we fall in, Sir Jacob?

SIR J. With pleasure, Mrs. Martingale—a little turn in the fresh air sharpens the appetite.

(MRS. POPPLES, MRS. BEAMISH, *and* VENEER *exeunt at back; the others are about to follow when* FLAPPER *stops them*)

FLAP. Stop one moment—such a rare joke! I've found a miniature that Veneer has just dropped—ho, ho, ho!

MISS N. A miniature! Whose is it?

FLAP. I don't know, for I can't find how it opens; but it must be a lady's gift, for I see engraved here on the back, "To him whose happiness makes mine."

POP. Ha, ha, ha! let me try it. It's hardly fair, but it will be such a laugh at Veneer. We shall know who the dear creature is.

SIR J. Well, don't keep us any longer in suspense: let us see who his enslaver is.

HAWK. Ay; break cover at once.

POP. I have it. Stand back now: I must enjoy the first peep myself. Poor Veneer! Ho, ho, ho, ho, ho! (*comes forward from the group, and opens the case; recognizing his wife's likeness—his laugh sinks into a faint quaver, and he gasps out in a tone of suppressed horror*) My wife!

HAWK. Well, whose is it?

OMNES. Ay, whose is it?

POP. (*with forced calmness, and thrusting the miniature into his pocket*) Nobody's!

HAWK. } Nobody's!
SIR J. }

POP. Nobody's! Such a joke! Ha, ha, ha! So good that—it can't be told. (*he sinks into a chair*)

SKRYM. Why, Peter, what ails thee, man? Your eye rolls—you're not well.

FLAP. Decidedly ill. My dear sir, let me feel your pulse.

HAWK. Open his collar.

POP. There's no occasion; I'm better now. 'Twas a sudden attack——

SIR J. Ah, I know—an overflow of blood.

POP. No, Sir Jacob, merely an overflow of friends. (*rises*)

Re-enter MRS. POPPLES, C. *down* R.

MRS. P. What are you waiting for? Is anything the matter?

POP. Nothing, Mrs. Popples—nothing: we're all going to see your Mexican cactus. (*the* CHARACTERS *group and go up the stage as act drop descends*)

END OF ACT I.

ACT II.

SCENE I.—*Same as in Act I.*

MISS NETTLEY *at the door of the room*, R., *trying to peep through the keyhole*; MISS DAW *and* MRS. MAJOR MARTINGALE *listening*; MRS. BEAMISH *standing*, R. C.

MRS. B. Well, what do you see, Miss Nettley?

MISS N. Nothing; the abominable keyhole is stopped on the inside.

MRS. B. Of course; he don't want the world to know what passes there.

MRS. M. I declare, I can hear nothing.

MRS. B. (*aside to* MISS DAW) I don't wonder at that, for the poor woman is as deaf as a post.

MISS N. I'm certain though that there's something improper going forward in that room; if there wasn't why should Mr. Popples spend so much of his time there alone?

MISS D. And never allow anybody to get a peep into it?

MISS N. And always lock the door, and keep the key in his pocket?

MISS D. I don't wish to make mischief, but I must say I heard more than once an infantine voice cry "Mamma," in that room.

MRS. B. Oh, 'twould be rare fun if we could detect Popples in a little delinquency.

MISS N. And expose the atrocious little wretch to his wife.

Miss D. (*at door*, R.) Hist, hist—there it is—don't you hear? There.

Mrs. B. Don't breathe—let us listen. (*they all listen eagerly—a voice as of a baby inside cries* "Mamma!" *two or three times*)

Miss N. There, are you satisfied now?

Mrs. M. I hear it: there's positively a child in the room.

Mrs. B. Oh, it's delightful: we shall so torment poor Popples! I wonder is he inside? Shall I knock and unkennel the sly fox?

Miss N. Not for the world; we'll manage it better by dropping a hint to his wife, and here she comes.

Enter Mrs. Popples, L. D.

Miss N. Ah, my sweet friend, we were this moment speaking of you; saying how happy you must be in this little Paradise, surrounded by everything you can desire; all the comforts of life; friends who love you; a husband who lets you have your own way——

Mrs. P. Heigho!

Miss N. Why do you sigh, dear, when your husband is mentioned?

Mrs. P. I don't know; but I fancy Popples has something on his mind that he won't confide to me.

Ladies. (*mysteriously*) Ha! Humph—indeed!

Mrs. P. Since yesterday he has scarcely spoken to me, and he has avoided me all this morning. I fear I have done something to displease him.

Miss N. Is it not more likely that he feels conscious of having done something that might displease you?

Mrs. P. Who? Poppy? Oh, you don't know him—he's the best and kindest man that ever breathed, though he has his oddities.

Mrs. B. Well, I'm glad you find him so, my dear; for my part I believe that all men are horrid wretches.

Mrs. M. (*to* Mrs. Beamish) Especially husbands; who would tyrannize over poor weak women if we did not manage by some means to put them down.

Miss N. (*apart to* Mrs. Popples) She has managed to put down four of them in her time!

Mrs. B. But do you really imagine, dear, that Mr. Popples has no secrets he wishes to conceal from you?

Miss N. No dark affair that he fears may come to your knowledge?

Miss D. No delicate mystery that he may wish to preserve?

Mrs. M. No shocking business that he's ashamed of?

Mrs. P. Ashamed! What could he be ashamed of? For heaven's sake, tell me what you mean? You know something concerning my husband?

Miss N. Oh, we know nothing—but we suspect.

Mrs. P. What do you suspect? I have a right to know.

Mrs. M. Certainly, my dear, 'tis the privilege of a wife to know everything bad of her husband.

Mrs. B. Of course; and if we were not your friends we should not tell you.

Mrs. P. Then for mercy sake do not torture me by those dark hints; speak plainly, or I will not listen to you a moment longer.

Miss N. Well, if you wish to be satisfied of Mr. Popple's baseness, just hearken. (*the voice in room,* R. *cries* "Mamma.")

Mrs. P. What is that? a child's voice in the room that he keeps so jealously closed against every intruder—no, no, it is fancy. (*voice again cries* "Mamma.") There *is* a child there,—and Popples whom I thought a model of morality: I'll go this moment and tax him with his perfidy.

Mrs. B. My dear creature, what would you do? make a scene, and so lose the advantage that you have gained? No, no; you must restrain your feelings, and silently hang up your wrongs, as schoolmasters do the birch, ready to be taken down at any moment to punish the offender.

Mrs. M. You ought to bless your stars, my dear, that you have got a domestic grievance that will never know rest; 'twill be as fresh in twenty years, if properly used, as at this moment.

Mrs. B. Then see the freedom it will give you to do just as you like, for your husband will never dare to censure your little foibles, while his own misdeeds are staring at him through your eyes; and if you should be tempted to retaliate, why—ha, ha, ha! really, as a woman of spirit—ha, ha, ha! I do not say how far *I* might go.

Mrs. P. You are right: I will not say a word, but he shall feel that I know his baseness, and can resent the insult he has offered to me.

Ladies. (*clap their hands*) Brava, Brava, Brava!

Mrs. B. And now let us go to the fish ponds, where we promised to meet Captain Hawkshaw and the gentlemen—you must not let such a trifle affect you, my love.

Mrs. P. Oh, it don't affect me in the least—I never, never was in better spirits—ha, ha, ha! (*laughs with forced gaiety*)

Enter Flapper, L.

Flapper, will you have the kindness to fetch our shawls and parasols after us? *Exit,* C.

Miss N. And my darling Bijou, if you please, Mr. Flapper. *Exit,* C.

Mrs. M. And there's a folding chair in the hall, Mr. Flapper, if you wouldn't think it too much trouble. *Exit,* C.

Mrs. B. And, Mr. Flapper, if you see my horse whip, will you bring it? *Exit,* C.

Miss D. Oh! and, Mr. Flapper, I've mislaid my goloshes, will you kindly look for them? *Exit,* C.

Flap. With the greatest pleasure. Upon my word—I flatter myself I am become useful at last. *Exit,* L 1 E.

Popples *puts his head in through door,* R., *and, seeing nobody, enters.*

Pop. I thought I heard voices; the house is like a rabbit warren since our friends took up their quarters here. Heigho! (*takes off a*

paper cap and white apron which he wears, and flings them into the room, of which he locks the door and puts the key in his pocket) There, I can work no longer: I'm disgusted with the world,—my heart's almost broken, and there's nothing now for me, but to smash my doll, and throw myself over Waterloo Bridge.

Enter SKRYMSHER, L. D.

SKRYM. I say, Peter, I've just been having a glass of ale with the butler—but, dash it, what's the matter wi'ye, eh? anything wrong? (POPPLES *wrings his hand*) Ah, that squeeze tells me there is. Coom, you shan't hide your troubles from an old friend. What has happened? Can't you get the doll to speak?

POP. Oh yes, it calls "Mamma," like a cherub; but I wish, Sam, I had never been left that unlucky legacy.

SKRYM. I thought it would come to this, you've got your wings daubed in the treacle of prosperity.

POP. It isn't that Sam, I could have struggled under the burthens of fortune, and have borne up against the trials of fashionable life, if I had only been left my doll and my wife. I thought that Polly loved me, I fondly imagined that I was the sole object of her affections until yesterday, when this miniature was picked up. (*takes miniature from his pocket and gives it to* SKRYMSHER) Her miniature, which that polished scoundrel Veneer, who calls himself my friend, dropped accidentally from his pocket.

SKRYM. Wh– e—w! ah, dear me!

POP. Sam, Sam, how I loved that woman, and she to deceive me to! (*sinks into a chair and covers his face with his handkerchief*)

SKRYM. Dash it, Peter, don't—don't, I say! (*whimpering*) You shouldn't give way to this weakness, you should be firm like me!

POP. Well, I will if I can; but 'twill be a hard struggle. Every man has his affections, even a doll maker has 'em, and it is not easy to root 'em out of the heart, like—like——

SKRYM. Like thistles out of corn, Peter. No more it is, but you must keep up your heart; perhaps after all's said, she has only been a little giddy.

POP. Ah! if I thought that her heart had not been poisoned by these vipers, I would instantly remove her from their society.

SKRYM. Quite right; but how is it to be done? Mrs. Popples may object, and then where are you?

POP. Where? In my own house, where I'll show them I'm master, by ordering them to quit it instantly.

SKRYM. Softly—softly, Peter, woah! Take care ye doa'nt make them laugh at thee without mending matters. We must hit on a plan to get these plaguey gentry to clear out of their own accord.

Enter FLAPPER, L., *carrying shawls and parasols, a folding chair, and lap-dog,* R.

FLAP. Mr. Popples, are you not coming to see the sport?

POP. What sport, Mr. Flapper?

FLAP. Oh, don't you know? Captain Hawkshaw is going to

have the fish-ponds dragged, and I'm carrying the ladies their shawls and parasols.

Pop. What do you say? Captain Hawkshaw going to have the fish-ponds dragged without my permission?

Flap. Certainly. You know we don't stand upon ceremony with you, you're such a good-natured fellow, and we are all your particular friends. *Exit*, C. L.

Skrym. Pleasant familiar sort o' people, Peter.

Pop. Never mind, I'll get rid of them, and I've thought of a way to do it. I'll give out that I'm ruined.

Skrym. Ecod! that's a sure way to get rid of one's friends.

Pop. You shall spread the report among them, Sam. Say that I have lost half my fortune by the failure of that pious bank; and the other half in the South African Tooth Drawing Company. Tell them that I'm a beggar, Sam.

Skrym. Dont'ee be afraid, it shan't be my fault if you're not in the Insolvent Court in five minutes.

Pop. Thanks, thanks. (*shakes his hand*) You're my only true friend. (*goes up with him looking off back at* L.) Look, Sam, look, there she is, coming up the walk! I'll stop and meet her with a withering look. What a figure she has, Sam. Isn't it lovely, and how she moves; but she shan't move me from my purpose.

Skrym. Don't brag, Peter, don't brag; many a stouter man than thee has been twisted round a woman's little finger. *Exit*, L.

Pop. Skrymsher evidently don't know me, he has a private conviction that I'm a fool; but I'll let him see that I'm not to be taken by my looks. I'll meet Mrs. Popples with a calm countenance and dignified deportment, and announce to her my intention of dispensing with her friends; if she demurs—(*buttoning up his coat*) my mind's made up.

Enter Mrs. Popples, C. L.; *she starts on seeing* Popples.

Mrs. P. (*aside*) He is here. He does not know that I have discovered his disgraceful secret; but I have promised my friend to say nothing about it yet.

Pop. Mrs. Popples, may I request a few minutes' conversation, if it be not detaining you too long from some one who may be expecting you.

Mrs. P. Oh, certainly, sir. (*aside*) What does this formal preface mean?

Pop. (*aside*) "Sir," she's on her guard. (*places a chair*) A chair, Mrs. Popples.

Mrs. P. *Merci mon ami.* (*aside*) What is to follow? (*she sits—*Popples *then draws a chair beside her, and sits*)

Pop. (L.) Mrs. Popples, I wish you to understand that I do not approve of the fashionable friends who have latterly so kindly made my house their home—hem!

Mrs. P. (R.) Indeed! Now I like them amazingly.

Pop. I hate the sight of them; they have no business here—they are intruders, ma'am, and I've come to the determination of getting rid of them.

Mrs. P. There may be another intruder beneath this roof, Mr. Popples, whom you should get rid of first.

Pop. Another intruder! (*aside*) She means Sam Skrymsher. I'll have fifty such intruders if I please, Mrs. Popples.

Mrs. P. This open avowal of your baseness is an insult that I will not endure, sir.

Pop. As you please, ma'am; but you shan't turn me from my resolution:—in one word then, Mrs. Popples, will you give up the society of your new friends?

Mrs. P. In one word then, Mr. Popples—No! (*both rise and put back chairs*)

Pop. I'm satisfied—perfectly satisfied, ma'am; at length I know you. I have not another word to say, except—good morning. (*going*, L.)

Mrs. P. (*curtseying formally*) Good morning, Mr. Popples.

Pop. (*returning*) I shan't remain in this house another hour; I'll start for Brighton—for Paris—for the North Pole—by the first train. (*going*, L.)

Mrs. P. Will you really deprive us of your company? *Mon Dieu! je me serai desolée de votre absence.* I trust you have provided an agreeable travelling companion, Mr. Popples.

Pop. Travelling companion! (*aside*) She says that to irritate me. Oh, yes—ha, ha, ha! I've taken care of that. (*aside*) I'll carry my doll with me.

Mrs. P. (*aside*) Pride support me! Well, *Bon voyage, mon cher.* When do you think of returning?

Pop. When? Never, perhaps—'tis very likely you may never see my face again. (*going*, L.)

Mrs. P. A moment, Popples. (*he stops—aside*) Shall I? no, no, he would despise me. (*to* Popples) Pray pick up my handkerchief before you go.

Pop. (*forgetting himself*) Certainly, my love—— no, I'll be hanged if I do! Falsest of women, farewell! *Exit*, L. D.

Mrs. P. Can he be gone?—has he really left me?—No, he could never do that! He'll return—I know he will. Perhaps I was wrong not to tell him my suspicions that some dreadful mystery is concealed in that room. Hah! he returns—I knew he would.

Re-enter Popples, L.

Pop. I've changed my mind—I will not quit my house; but observe me, Mrs. Popples—I'll have a separation.

Mrs. P. (*alarmed*) A separation! (*aside*) If I give way now, what will my friends say? Well, sir?

Pop. I repeat, ma'am, we shall be parted as far asunder—as—as—law and justice; that's my unalterable determination.

Mrs. P. (*struggling with herself—aside*) I don't care; why should I care? he's no longer worthy of my affection.

Pop. Do you hear, ma'am?—we part for ever. *Exit*, L. D.

Mrs. P. With all my—all my—all—— I'll not let him have the last word. (*runs to* L. D., *and calls after* Popples) With all my

heart, Mr. Popples. There, there—I'm glad it's over; I've shewn him I possess a woman's spirit, and now—ha, ha, ha!

(*bursts into tears and rushes off*, C. D.)

Re-enter POPPLES, L.

POP. Before all is ended between us, Mrs. Popples, I wish to ask you one question—— Hey, she's gone; I'm glad of it—I'm very glad of it, for I feel I should have been melted by a single kind word from her. (*looking off at back*) Ah, here's one of my worst plagues; I'll bury myself amongst my dolls to avoid him.

(*unlocks door*, R., *takes the key out, and exit*)

Enter HAWKSHAW, L. C., *he has an open letter in his hand.*

HAWK. What an infernal bore is this paying of debts! That rascal Cape threatens me with a writ unless I fork out the amount of three acceptances of mine instanter. I must try to raise the wind in some quarter.

Enter VENEER, C., *with a bouquet, which he lays on table*, L.

(*aside*) Here's Veneer, who never lent me sixpence since he came of age. By-the-bye, Veneer, you can do me a favour, my dear fellow. There's a rascally wine merchant pressing me for his paltry account. I wish you could accommodate me with a couple of hundreds for a week—only for a week?

VENEER. With the greatest pleasure in life, my dear Hawkshaw, I would,—but for one circumstance,—I've made a resolution.

HAWK. A resolution!—to what effect?

VENEER. Never to lend money to a man I have a regard for. (*shakes* HAWKSHAW'S *hand*) It invariably destroys friendship.

Enter FLAPPER *at back*, C.

HAWK. Oh, hang friendship—lend me the tin.

FLAP. Eh? what is that you say about lending? Can I be useful in any way, Captain?

HAWK. Yes, if you can lend me a brace of hundreds.

FLAP. Well, 'pon my life now, it's rather remarkable, I don't think I've got so much at my bankers; but I'll lend you my name, if you like—it's not worth much, but you're quite welcome to it.

VENEER. Why don't you ask Popples to accommodate you?

HAWK. The fact is, I've had two or three severe pulls at him lately—he might refuse.

VENEER. Ah, you need not fear—he'll esteem it an honor to be ruined by such distinguished friends as you.

HAWK. Egad, then, I'll bleed him for another five hundred this evening.

Enter SIR JACOB MALMSEY, C. *down* R., *in a state of great consternation.*

SIR J. Ha! Have you heard the appalling news? Popples is ruined!

OMNES. Ruined!

Sir J. His friend Skrymsher has just told me in confidence that the South African Elephant Tooth Drawing Company, of which he was a director, is burst up, and that some large speculations he has been making on the Stock Exchange have failed; that—in short—he has lost every penny he is worth.

Hawk. The devil he has! Then I consider it most disgraceful conduct for any man to suffer himself to be ruined by strangers, when he has so many friends anxious to undertake that pleasing duty.

Sir J. There's nothing but ingratitude in the world. The thoughts of it has quite taken away my appetite, which I was tenderly nursing for a charming red mullet, which the cook told me was to be dressed for dinner.

Enter Miss Nettley, c. Popples *appears listening at the partly open door,* r.

Miss N. (*down* l.) I see by your countenances that you have heard the distressing news. I understand there's an execution and two bailiffs in the kitchen.

Enter Mrs. Beamish, Mrs. Martingale, *and* Miss Daw, c.

Mrs. B. Good heavens! what is this horrid report? Popples arrested for ten thousand pounds?

Sir J. Well, I can't positively say; but it's a fact that he's utterly ruined.

Mrs. M. In that case, the sooner we march out of the garrison the better.

Hawk. Decidedly.

Sir J. No, no—I protest against it. We must not abandon our friend until we have eaten his last dinner.

Veneer. Sir Jacob is right; we have been invited here to enjoy the hospitality of our host, and not to disturb ourselves with his private distresses.

Flap. Certainly not.

Hawk. That being the general opinion, it is agreed that we are to be ignorant of this awkward affair, and that we meet our hosts as if nothing had happened.

All. Agreed—agreed!

Mrs. B. Perfectly unanimous. Come then, Captain Hawkshaw, remember you are engaged to play a match of billiards with me.

Hawk. Ever at your service, madam. (*gives her his arm*)

Popples *retires and closes door,* r.

Mrs. B. Or suppose we play at pool; you'll make one, Veneer?

Veneer. I should be delighted, but I've somehow sprained my wrist.

Flap. Can I make myself useful? You'll want one to mark your game, Mrs. Beamish.

Mrs. B. No thank you, Flapper, I always mark my own game.

Whips Flapper *with her handkerchief, and exit with* Hawkshaw, l. c.

Flap. That was the unkindest cut—no matter. Mrs. Martingale,

allow me—(*he offers her his arm, at the moment she takes* Sir Jacob's) Oh, I beg pardon—somebody must want me. Miss Nettley.

Offers her his arm, she draws herself up stiffly, curtsies formally, and exit after Sir Jacob *and* Mrs. Martingale, L. C.

Very extraordinary—no one seems disposed to accept my attentions. (*perceives* Miss Daw) Hem—Miss Daw. (Miss Daw *simpers affectedly —aside*) The last rose of summer, it can't be avoided. Will you take my arm, Miss Daw?

Miss D. With pleasure—he, he, he, he!

Takes his arm—both exeunt, L. C.

Veneer. (*comes down*, C.) Egad, this smash comes exactly as I could wish! Not a moment must be lost in declaring myself unequivocally to Mrs. Popples, who, being a woman of sense, will naturally prefer the position I shall offer her, to the virtuous alternative of miserable obscurity with her husband. I'll write to her this moment.

Takes the bouquet from table, and exit, L.

Enter Skrymsher, L. C.

Skrym. I've been watching at the gate to give them a cheer at parting, but none of them have left yet.

Enter Popples, R. D., *leaving key in door.*

Why, Peter, what's the meaning of this; though your'e a ruined man, your friends still stick to you?

Pop. Yes, they've resolved to stay by the wreck while it holds together—they're only waiting till I go to pieces, to take their leave.

Skrym. Dang 'em, I'd like to have the worrying of such varmin—but you've seen Mrs. P.—it's all settled wi' her?

Pop. Yes; all's settled.

Skrym. She has consented then to give up her friends?

Pop. No she hasn't; she has absolutely refused me, and I've made up my mind to be separated from her.

Skrym. Why, never—noa!

Pop. I tell you I have, so don't try to shake my resolution.

Skrym. I woan't.

Pop. Not that I'd be angry, Sam, if you tried, for you'd find how firm I can be when I please. After what has passed, 'tis better that we part.

Skrym. Well, perhaps it is; I've known several respectable couples enjoy a deal of matrimonial happiness by separation.

Pop. I know I shall be happy as a sand boy, Sam, when I'm left a gay bachelor—we'll have such fun, my boy, eh?

(*sings*) I'll live at my ease,
And I'll do as I please,
And I'll—I'll never be married again.
(*while he sings, his emotion increases*)
I'll never—never be—nev——

It's nothing—nothing, Sam; a tightness in the throat, that's all. We'll part quietly—nobody shall perceive that there has been any difference between us; but we will part, and——

(*sings*) I'll live at my ease,
And I'll do—I'll do as I please——

Don't imagine, Sam, that any fond weakness still lingers in my heart —no, I feel that all is marble here—(*striking his breast and nearly crying*) marble, Sam,—marble.

SKRYM. No, it ain't, Peter; your heart is as soft as a cream cheese.

POP. How dare you say so;—how dare you think so, Sam.

SKRYM. Well, doant'ee fly in a passion about it, but tell me what you mean to do with these folk that won't be frightened away.

POP. You see, Sam, while they stick together they're too many for me, but if I can only set them quarrelling amongst themselves they'll drive each other out of the house.

SKRYM. Ecod, I like that! but how is it to be done?

POP. In the first place, you must go to the billiard room, where they are all collected, and tell them—in strict confidence, that the story of my being ruined was a hoax.

SKRYM. A hoax, Peter?

POP. Of mine, merely to try their friendship, which I find has come like gold out of the fire.

SKRYM. I hope I mayn't laugh in their faces.

POP. Then you must add, that I have determined to bestow a costly piece of plate upon the most faithful and disinterested of my friends.

SKRYM. But they're all a d——d pack of——

POP. Don't interrupt me, Sam. The presentation will take place this evening, when I shall take an opportunity of saying a few words upon their merits.

SKRYM. Hey! dang it, I think I see what you're driving at. I'll do it, Peter—I'll do it: they'll fall into the trap like wasps into a cream jug! (*going*, L.)

POP. Stay, Sam, you must also tell each of my friends privately that I shall be alone in the Yew-Tree Walk at the bottom of the garden, shortly before the hour of presentation.

SKRYM. I'll not forget: the Yew-Tree Walk. Oh, oh, oh! Odsbobs! we'll have such sport wi' them. *Exit*, C. L.

POP. (*sighing*) Ah, if I had never been afflicted with fortune, none of these miseries could have come upon me. I should have fewer friends, but fewer troubles, and have been a happy doll maker to this day. Ha! well, it can't be helped now. I'll make one more effort to shake off these vampires; if I fail, I'll set fire to the house, and smoke them out like rats. *Exit at back*, R. C.

Enter MRS. POPPLES, L., *she carries the same bouquet that* VENEER *had in the preceding scene, and holds an open note in her hand.*

MRS. P. Impertinent coxcomb! Presuming on my having listened to, and laughed at his absurd flatteries, to insult me by this letter placed in a bouquet, which he sends me by my maid. (*reads*) "Idol of my soul——" Oh, that I were a man to chastise him for his audacity! (*reads*) "Pardon the utterance of a passion that can no longer be restrained. I love you, and love, like a

torrent, overleaps every obstacle." Mighty fine, upon my word! (*reads*) "The circumstances in which you are placed must be painful——" He alludes to my husband's conduct—everybody knows it. (*reads*) "Quit then an irksome position, and accept all that the most devoted heart can offer." How shall I punish this fellow's presumption? If I publish it, the world will say I have given him encouragement. Ha! (*pause*) I think I perceive a way to wound him with his own weapon. He has had the caution not to address his billet. (*calls*) Mincing!

Enter MINCING, L.; MRS. POPPLES *folds up the note, and places it amongst the flowers of the bouquet.*

MINCING. Yes, mem.

MRS. P. There has been some mistake, Mincing, in sending this bouquet to me. Take it directly to Mrs. Major Martingale.

MINCING. Certainly, mem; but Mr. Veneer said——

MRS. P. Never mind what he said, the floral compliment was intended for Mrs. Major Martingale. There—(*gives* MINCING *the bouquet*)—give it to her; and do you hear, Mincing, don't say who sent it, and mention nothing about it having been in my hands—you understand?

MINCING. Yes, mem? I'll take care.

MRS. P. Hist! I see her coming. (MRS. POPPLES *goes up*, C., *and remains in view in the grounds*)

Enter MRS. MARTINGALE, L. D.

MINCING. Oh, mem! Mrs. Martingale, I've got something for you, mem—this bokay, mem. (*gives* MRS. MARTINGALE *the bouquet*)

MRS. M. How beautiful! Who sent it, Mincing?

MINCING. Oh, mem, you may guess it was somebody; but I mustn't tell. *Exit*, L. D.

MRS. M. Mustn't tell! (*turning the bouquet in her fingers—the billet drops on the floor*) Ah, a note! (*she picks it up hastily, and opening it, reads it to herself with an expression of delighted surprise*) Mercy on me, is it possible?—Am I not deceived? No! (*looking at signature*) "Arlington Veneer." A formal declaration of love, and a summons to surrender my heart at discretion. Oh, this will be gall and wormwood to some of my friends—ha, ha, ha! That he should fall to my lot after all—ha, ha, ha, ha! (MRS. POPPLES *comes down*, R.—MRS. MARTINGALE *perceives her*) My dear friend, I'm so glad you're here;—such a secret as I've got to tell you—ha, ha, ha!

MRS. P. An amusing one it would seem.

MRS. M. Oh, no, quite serious. Heigho! poor Veneer.

MRS. P. Veneer—what has happened to him?

MRS. M. He has fallen in love; and with whom do you imagine?

MRS. P. With whom?—why with himself:—an early attachment, but unlike most early attachments, a very constant one.

MRS. M. (*aside*) Now I'll sting her to the heart, for I know she fancies that Vencer admires her. What would you say if *I* was the object of his adoration? Read that note which I have just received from him, and judge the emotions of my heart. (*gives the note to* MRS. POPPLES, *who glances over it*)

MRS. P. (*reads*) "Idol of my soul."

MRS. M. Idol of my soul!—insinuating wretch!

MRS. P. (*reading*) Um—um—um! "Passion—love—torrent—obstacle. The circumstances under which you are placed must be painful."

MRS. M. How well he understands the feelings of a widow's heart.

MRS. P. (*reading*) "Accept all that the most devoted heart can offer—now and for ever yours—Arlington Veneer."

MRS. M. Well, what do you advise me to?

MRS. P. I'm almost afraid to give any opinion on so delicate a subject.

MRS. M. Oh! you need not hesitate—for to confess the truth, I have already made up my mind.

MRS. P. (*laughing*) And so you think there can be no harm in asking advice.

MRS. M. That's exactly my feeling.

MRS. P. Then I advise you strongly to follow your own inclination.

MRS. M. Well, it is wonderful how our sentiments agree. But don't you think, my dear, I ought to make a slight show of resistance to save appearances? What would he think if I surrendered upon the first summons?

MRS. P. He might think that the most venerable fortress is often the easiest taken.

MRS. M. Venerable! Allow me to say, Mrs. Popples, that the term you have applied——

MRS. P. Was used only in a military sense.

MRS. M. Oh, that indeed.—What, you're going? Well, you know this is to be a profound secret for the present. I have not mentioned it to a soul but yourself, but I could conceal nothing from so dear a friend.

MRS. P. (*laughing*) Rely upon my discretion. Your secret shall be perfectly safe with me. *Exit*, L.

MRS. M. She laughs, but I know she's bursting with rage at my conquest.

Enter SKRYMSHER, C. *followed by* HAWKSHAW, SIR JACOB MALMSEY, FLAPPER, MRS. BEAMISH, *and* MISS NETTLEY—*they pluck him from side to side while speaking.*

HAWK. Do you really tell us, Mr. Skrymsher, that it was all a hoax?

SIR J. That there was no foundation for the report of our dear friend, Popples, being ruined?

FLAP. That he's not a bankrupt?

MRS. B. Nor an insolvent debtor?

HAWK. Nor a lame duck?

SKRYM. Lame dook?

HAWK. You know; a waddler on the Stock Exchange.

SIR J. Nor a broken down director of the South African Elephant Tooth Drawing Company?

MISS N. With two executions and a couple of bailiffs in the kitchen?

SKRYM. Hey, haw! nothing of the sort. I've told ye already he hasn't lost a penny. It was a joke of Peter's; Peter be desp'rate fond of a joke. (*goes up*)

SIR J. There, you see if you hadn't taken my advice—never to desert a friend while he can put a good dinner on his table, what a fatal error we should have committed.

HAWK. It was clearly a deep plan to try our friendship.

SIR J. And we have nobly stood the test. When we heard of his ruin we only rallied closer round him, and prepared to eat his last haunch of venison with tears in our eyes.

MRS. B. But how noble of Popples to think of presenting a testimonial to the friend amongst us who merits it most.

MRS. M. I heard nothing of this. A testimonial! Who has seen it?

FLAP. I have. A splendid silver epergne; can't be worth less than five hundred pounds.

HAWK. (*aside*) Raise two hundred on it at any moment!

FLAP. And it's to be presented this afternoon to the fortunate individual.

HAWK. (*aside*) Let me see. I must manage to get this piece of plate—but how? Drop a few hints to Popples about his friends here. Right!—Skrymsher, my dear fellow. (*taking his arm and aside*) I want to have a little confidential conversation with our friend, Popples; where do you think I could find him?

SKRYM. (*aside to him*) In the Yew-Tree Walk, at bottom o' garden; he's there now, Captain.

HAWK. (*aside to him*) Thank you, that will do

Goes off, C., *humming an air carelessly.*

SIR J. (*aside*) I must speak with Popples before any of the others get hold of him. Some of the servants may know where he is.

Exit, C.

Enter MISS DAW, L.

MRS. B. (*apart to* MISS DAW) Miss Daw, my dear, can you tell me where Mr. Popples is?

MISS D. (*apart to* MRS. BEAMISH) Oh yes, mem! I saw him a few minutes since turning into the Yew-Tree Walk.

MRS. B. (*apart to* MISS DAW) The Yew-Tree Walk! I'm much obliged. *Exit*, L. C., MISS DAW *exit*, L.

MRS. M. (*who has been speaking aside to* SKRYMSHER) I understand! The Yew-Tree Walk?

SKRYM. (*aside to her*) He's there now.

MRS. M. (*aside*) I'll stroll down there accidentally. *Exit*, L. C

MISS N. (*aside*) There's certainly something going forward. Such whispers and mysterious looks. I'll follow Mrs. Beamish and discover what it is. *Exit*, L. C.

FLAP. They're all gone, and here I am left with Great Grimsby. I'll go and see if I can be of use to anybody.

Exit, C. L.

SKRYM. There, they're off to hunt for Popples; all started for the plate. The Captain's got away with the lead, but the race isn't

won yet, for there's Mrs. Martingale and Sir Jacob hanging on his quarters with little Flapper in attendance. Go along my beauties; I'll take the field against the favourite.—'Tis the way of the world, every one trying to get the better of his neighbour. It don't matter a bean to me who wins;—but I like to see the sport—so I'll e'en stay and watch the upshot of it.

Exit, L. C.

END OF ACT II.

ACT III.

SCENE I.—*A walk in the Garden with a closely clipped hedge crossing the stage. Two practicable alcoves in the hedge*, R. *and* L., *over and beyond which is seen a pleasure ground; an opening in the hedge*, C., *corresponding with the alcoves; a rustic garden seat*, L.

POPPLES *enters the walk*, R. 1 E.

POP. I feel like an Italian Brigand lying in ambush for his victims. The sacrifice will be great, but it must be made. Friends are heaven's choicest blessings, but when they fall too heavily upon a man of weak constitution, he must shake them off the best way he can. Hist! here's one of the devoted tribe.

Enter HAWKSHAW, L. 1 E.

HAWK. My dear Popples, I'm devilish glad I chanced to meet you alone; in fact I've been for some time wishing to speak with you privately, as a friend—a friend whom I esteem and admire—I do, 'pon my soul. You're a devilish good-natured fellow, Popples—you are, 'pon my life, but you're mistaken in some of your friends.

POP. Mistaken, Captain? impossible! All my friends are good friends, and true friends—ask Sir Jacob Malmsey if they're not—I see him coming down the walk.

HAWK. Sir Jacob! don't believe a word he says; I can tell you something about him—so beware of him: I'll keep out of his way. (*aside*) From the alcove I can overhear what he says.

Makes a false exit, R., *steals back, and conceals himself in alcove*, R. C.

Enter SIR JACOB, L. 1 E.

POP. What, Sir Jacob, enjoying a quiet walk?

SIR J. Yes, a little gentle exercise, between meals, promotes digestion and invigorates the appetite. By-the-bye, Mr. Popples, let me beg your acceptance of a box of Sir Carnaby Carbuncle's Anti-dyspeptic pills. (*takes a box of pills from his pocket and gives them to* POPPLES)

POP. Thank you, Sir Jacob, but as I'm not dyspeptic——

SIR J. Never mind, sir, you may be, you may be, and then you'll bless me for the gift. Harkye, Mr. Popples, you shall have Sir Carnaby's original receipt for the pills—I'll bestow it on you as a

mark of my inflexible friendship. (*sighs*) Ah! friendship is a noble sentiment, Mr. Popples.

Pop. So the poets and other fabulists say, Sir Jacob.

Sir J. So tender am I in my notions on that point, that I direct my cook to dress her pigeons in pairs, for I would not have those who have been united in life, divided, even in a pie.

Pop. Ha, ha! what a pity it is, Sir Jacob, that all men are not possessed of your exalted feelings. (Captain Hawkshaw *listening from alcove*, R.)

Flapper *appears at* L. 2 E., *listening.*

Sir. J. 'Tis my weakness, Mr. Popples—I don't mind telling you I'm the most disinterested man breathing, but it goes to my heart to see you duped by a set of selfish people who call themselves your friends. (Flapper *glides into alcove*, L.)

Hawk. (*aside and using threatening gestures*) Treacherous scoundrel!

Pop. Don't say that, Sir Jacob, don't say that, after all their professions.

Sir J. Professions! humbug! gross humbug, sir! Who is your friend, I ask you? Is it that impudent rascal, Hawkshaw, who tricks you into buying his broken-down hacks, and when your back is turned, swears you wouldn't know a horse from a bullock but for the horns?

Pop. But for the horns; he says that, does he?

Hawk. (*aside*) I'll exterminate the old rhinoceros.

Sir J. Next to Hawkshaw, the greatest humbug I ever met—(Flapper *shows himself*)—is that officious little toady, Flapper. (Flapper *shakes his fist*)

Pop. Poor little Flapper, he's the confidential friend of Hawkshaw.

Sir J. His friend! his jackal, sir. He told me confidentially that there's not a greater rogue unhanged than the Captain.

Flap. (*aside*) Ooh! (*comes out of alcove and gets behind the garden seat*, L.)

Pop. To think how we may be deceived in people.

Sir J. Not if you would take my advice.

Pop. Sir Jacob, here's Mrs. Martingale coming.

Hawkshaw *conceals himself, and* Flapper *retires into* L. 2 E.

Sir J. Psha, I don't want to meet the old woman! Mind what I told you though. (*aside*) I know she's manœuvering for the testimonial, so I'll get round on the other side of the hedge and listen.

Exit through opening, C.

Hawkshaw *comes out of alcove cautiously*, R.

Hawk. (*down*, R. C) Is he gone? My dear Popples, I hope you didn't believe a word of what that d——d, vile-tongued hypocrite, Sir Jacob has been saying. You don't know him—I do—

Sir Jacob *appears above the hedge*, L. C.

and I'm bound to say, that a more vicious, lying old brute, never put his head in a friend's manger. That's my candid opinion of him.

Exit, R.

Enter MRS. MARTINGALE, L. 1 E.

MRS. M. My dear Mr. Popples, where have you been all this day? I could not imagine what had become of you.

POP. You are very kind, in fact, all my friends are very kind.

MRS. M. No doubt some people can be kind when it suits their interest. I say nothing—not I, but I'd merely advise you to be on your guard against false friends.

POP. False friends! I can't believe there are such monsters in the world; at all events, there are none amongst the faithful band to whom I have opened my doors and and my arms. (POPPLES *perceives* SIR JACOB, L. C., *looking over the hedge*) There, for instance, is my valued friend, Sir Jacob Malmsey——

MRS. M. Sir Jacob, ha, ha, ha! Why it was only yesterday your valued friend said, that nothing but the excellence of your dinners could compensate for the dullness of your company.

SIR J. (*agitated—aside*) There's a villanous old cockatrice.

POP. Sir Jacob ridicule me! I can't believe it of a man who loves me as he does.

MRS. M. It is a proof of your excellent heart, Mr. Popples, to think so; but next to himself, the only thing on earth, Sir Jacob loves is a good dinner. (SIR JACOB *uses threatening gestures*) Then, there's Flapper. (FLAPPER *listening*, L. 2 E.)

POP. Aye, where could you find a man like Flapper, so ready to assist a friend?

MRS. M Lord help you, he lives by assisting his friends. He'd assist with pleasure at your funeral if he could only get a pair of gloves and a hatband by it. (FLAPPER *expresses his rage by gestures and retires*)

POP. I hope 'twill be a long time before I require his tender attentions.

MISS NETTLEY *steals in* L. 1 E., *and conceals herself in alcove*, L.

MRS. M. But that's not all. Hawkshaw designs on your purse, and Veneer has designs on your——

POP. Stop, stop! Have I no friends, even among your sex, Mrs. Martingale?

MRS. M. Yes, one real friend, my dear sir, who blushes for her sex; and especially warns you against that spiteful old maid, Miss Nettley, who says the most malicious things of he kind acquaintance possible. (MISS NETTLEY *appears enraged*)

POP. (*aside*) Ha, ha, ha! portraits painted in this style by a friend.

MRS. BEAMISH. (*at a distance*, L.) Yoick, yoick!

MRS. M. Bless me, 'tis that odious flirt, Mrs. Beamish! I don't wish to speak harshly of one of my own sex, but beware of that woman. You have a susceptible heart, Mr. Popples, a kind heart sir. She knows your amiable weakness, and she'll wind round you with a playful familiarity that makes me tremble.

POP. Good gracious! a playful boa constrictor winding round me.

MRS. BEAMISH. (*without*) Yoick, yoick! Where are you, Popples?

POP. Here, this way—this way!

Goes to L. 1 E. *while* MRS. MARTINGALE *conceals herself in alcove*, R.

Enter MRS. BEAMISH, L.

MRS. B. Why you're harder to find than the philosopher's stone. Alone, hey? I was afraid that horrid old woman, Mrs. Martingale, might have been entertaining you with some of her scandalous histories.

MRS. M. (*aside in alcove*, R.) Horrid old woman!

POP. Oh, no—not at all; but you're rather severe upon Mrs. Martingale—I believe she has an excellent heart.

MRS. B. Ha, ha, ha! why her heart is as black and as false as her curls. *Apropos* of curls; have you heard that droll story about the kid gloves?

POP. Kid gloves! never.

MRS. B. I don't know that I ought to tell you, but—ha, ha, ha, ha! 'twould be a pity not. (*takes his arm*) You must know, then, that Mrs. Martingale's luxuriant head of hair is—a wig.

POP. A wig! That splendid head and front a popular fallacy—those luxuriant curls a delusion and a snare?

MRS. B. There can be no doubt of it. The wig used to be smuggled to and from the hair dresser's in a box labelled "French Kid Gloves."

POP. Ho, ho, ho, ho!

MRS. B. Well it happened unfortunately that Mrs. Martingale having lost a wager of a dozen gloves to Charley Craddock of the Guards on the last Oaks, desired one of her servants to take a parcel of gloves which lay on the drawing-room table to Charley's lodgings; but the fellow who had only been in the house a few days, and knew nothing of the mystery of the French kids, mistaking the box which the hair dresser had just brought home, carried it with his mistress's compliments to Charley, whose astonishment you may imagine, on opening it to find, instead of the gloves, Mrs. Martingale's new wig. (*rage of* MRS. MARTINGALE)

SIR J. Ho, ho, ho, ho! (SIR JACOB *and the others, who have been eagerly listening to* MRS. BEAMISH, *instantly conceal themselves*—POPPLES *laughs aside*)

MRS. B. (*alarmed*) Did you hear? Somebody has been listening.

POP. Impossible! None of our friends would be guilty of so mean an action.

MRS. B. Don't be too sure of that. Let us walk on a little this way, and I'll surprise you about some of them.

POP. With pleasure; but I don't think you can surprise me.

POPPLES *and* MRS. BEAMISH *go off*, R. 1 E. *At the same time* MISS NETTLEY *comes from the alcove*, L., *and steals off*, L. MRS. MARTINGALE *comes from alcove*, R.

MRS. M. Oh, the base unkind woman, to circulate that horrid story. How did she hear it? I had enough to do to restrain myself from rushing on her, and tearing her eyes out. Dear me—I'm so agitated,—and as I live, here comes Veneer, poor fellow; seeking for me, no doubt.

Enter VENEER, L. 1 E.

Oh dear, Mr. Veneer, you so startled me.

VENEER. Pardon, madam! (*aside*) I surely saw Mrs. Popples turn into one of those walks. I—I really did not perceive you. (*aside*) What is the plaguey old woman doing here?

MRS. M. (*aside*) He won't speak—The natural diffidence of youth—I find I must make the first advance. There are occasions, Mr. Veneer, when a female of the strictest decorum may say to one of your sex—— (*playing with the bouquet she carries*) you have a charming taste in flowers!

VENEER. Eh? Oh! ah! yes—tawl'ble. (*aside*) What the devil is she driving at?

MRS. M. Nothing can be more elegant than the arrangement of these flowers.

VENEER. (*drawling*) Very elegant—certainly. (*looks carelessly at the bouquet, which he recognises—with sudden animation*) Hey! that bouquet! Pardon me, it contained——

MRS. M. He, he, he! An interesting note from you.

VENEER. (*aside*) Mrs. Popples must have made the old lady her confidant. May I then enquire, madam, what is to be my fate.

MRS. M. Well, I may tell you that your cause had a warm advocate here. (*laying her hand upon her heart*) You may hope.

VENEER. Best of women, I thank you. (*kisses her hand*) You have made me the happiest of mortals.

MRS. M. Oh, dear! I never thought to be placed in this peculiar position again, but the ardour of your passion has overcome my scruples—my heart responds to your love. Oh! what weak creatures we women are. Take me—take me, Arlington—I am all your own. (*sinks on his shoulder*)

VENEER. (*surprised and angry*) All mine, madam? The weight of the favour overpowers me.

Enter MRS. POPPLES, L.

MRS. P. Ha, ha, ha! Pray don't allow me to interrupt so tender a scene. I've witnessed nothing.

VENEER. Zounds! I beg pardon, Mrs. Popples, don't go—allow me, Mrs. Martingale, to explain—there has been some unaccountable mistake here.

MRS. P. A mistake? Ha, ha, ha, ha!

MRS. M. (*indignantly*) A mistake! What do you mean, sir?

VENEER. I protest I am guiltless of any intention to invade Mrs. Martingale's heart; there was a note I confess, but——

MRS. M. Yes, sir, a note in the bouquet you sent me—there it is. (*shows the note*)

MRS. P. (*taking the note and glancing at it*) Oh, this isconclusive evidence! You can't deny your writing, Mr. Veneer.

VENEER. No, madam, I acknowledge it, but the note was intended for——(*a pause*)

MRS. P. For whom pray?

MRS. M. Yes, sir, for whom?

VENEER. For—for—I don't exactly know. (*aside*) I've got into a pretty dilemma here.

MRS. M. (*loftily*) Sir—Mr. Veneer, beware how you attempt to trifle with my affection. There are laws in England, laws, sir, to

punish the trampler upon female feelings; and juries, sir, juries, who will repair by adequate damages the injuries inflicted on a broken heart. *Exit*, L.

MRS. P. On a broken heart, sir, ha, ha, ha, ha! Oh, you gay deceiver. *Exit*, R.

VENEER. Confound it! this is the most ridiculous situation in which I was ever placed. I shall be the butt of all the fellows at the clubs for the next month, if this absurd affair gets wind.

Exit, R. 1 E.

SCENE II.—*An Apartment in Popple's Villa, as before; round table*, C.

MINCING *and* JAMES *discovered arranging furniture;* MINCING *places the epergne, which is covered, on the table*, C.

MINCING. If there ever was a beautiful article, that's it. Do, James, come here, and you shall have a look at it.

JAMES. Ah! no doubt it's splendid, but master and his friends will be here in a minute, and I must put the room to rights.

MINCING. Well, make haste,—here comes Miss Daw.

JAMES. Ah, poor soul! we don't mind her, she's only an humble friend.

MINCING. That means a servant who is above taking wages.

Exit JAMES *and* MINCING, L.

Enter MISS DAW, L. C.

MISS D. Something tells me I shall shortly sleep in a strange bed. I'm not very superstitious, but it is remarkable—I dreamt last night I was cutting my own bread and butter, and whenever I have had that horrid dream, I have always been obliged to look out for fresh quarters. As the humble friend of the family, I should be sorry to quit the house without some little story or curious bit of family history to relate. If I could only get a peep into that room where we heard the baby this morning, I might discover something wrong—something horrible, that might create a sensation. I don't hear the child now; perhaps the helpless innocent has been silenced for ever. Popples has certainly some dreadful secret on his mind, and Skrymsher, I have no doubt, is his accomplice. I don't like that man's looks. Hark! (*crosses to door*, R.) Bless me, here's the key in the door! Mr. Popples has forgotten it, and there's nobody looking—such an opportunity I may never have again. (*opens door*, R. 1 E., *cautiously, peeps into the room and then goes in*)

Enter POPPLES *from the grounds*, C., *and at the same time, enter* SKRYMSHER, L.

POP. At last I shall be delivered of my plagues. Well, Sam, are they coming?

SKRYM. Yes, here's a batch of them, true to the minute.

Enter severally, HAWKSHAW, VENEER, *and* MRS. BEAMISH, C.

POP. Prompt at the call of friendship (*aside*) and of interest.

SIR JACOB, MRS. MARTINGALE, *and* MISS NETTLEY, *then enter severally, &c.; they walk about regarding each other with ill-concealed anger.*

Ah! this is something like punctuality. I believe we are all assembled. I've been planning a little surprise for you.

MRS. B. I dare say it will be something very charming.

POP. We shall see! we shall see! (*shakes hands with them as they come down*)

MRS. M. (*apart to* POPPLES) Remember, you have but one friend.

HAWK. (*apart to* POPPLES) Don't forget, Sir Jacob is an old humbug.

MRS. MARTINGALE *crosses to where* VENEER *is standing, he gets away from her, and comes down on the opposite side,* L.—SIR JACOB *sits*—MRS. MARTINGALE *in passing* MRS. BEAMISH *tosses her head contemptuously.*

MRS. M. (*half aside*) Impudence!

MRS. B. (*aside to* POPPLES) What a figure!

VENEER. (*aside*) How the old woman pursues me! *(crosses and sits,* R., FLAPPER *places chairs chairs for ladies, then seats himself—all seated except* POPPLES)

POP. (*standing* R. C., *near the table*) Hem, hem! Ladies and gentlemen!

HAWK. Hear, hear!

POP. I rise on the present occasion oppressed by feelings—that—feelings which swell my bosom, and may be better expressed than understood.

SKRYM. (L. C.) Very good, Peter. Go on, lad, go on!

POP. Ladies and gentlemen, I need not tell you that I have many friends who have attatched themselves to me in the kindest and closest manner.

FRIENDS. Hear, hear, hear!

POP. Friends, who to do them justice—have steadily carried out the friendly principle of making all that was mine their own.

SKRYM. Hear, hear, Peter!

POP. I saw it—I felt it—and resolved to prove my gratitude by presenting this testimonial to my best friend. (*he takes the linen cover off the piece of plate*)

FRIENDS. (*applauding*) Bravo, bravo, bravo!

HAWK. Devilish handsome, Popples. I don't care who gets it, but the idea—the idea is really princely. (*the other* FRIENDS *rise and examine the testimonial,* C.)

MRS. M. What a beautiful work of art, and what a proof of a noble mind.

SIR J. By Jove! a splendid centre for a dinner table.

VENEER. It is positively an elegant affair!

FLAP. Magnificent!

SKRYM. Well, it is downright pratty.

MRS. B. Beautiful! I'm perfectly in love with it.

MRS. M. (*half aside*) Well, if that be not a broad hint. (*the* FRIENDS *return to their seats*)

POP. There stands friendship's offering, the tribute of esteem

which I am about to bestow on my dearest friend. (*he regards the* FRIENDS, R. *and* L. *attentively*)

MRS. B. (*aside*) I'm certain he looked at me.

MRS. M. (*aside*) I hope my countenance don't betray my anxiety.

POP. Looking to the right, I behold friends. (*those on the* R. *bow*) And looking to the left, I behold friends. (*those on the* L. *bow*) In short I am surrounded by friends, whose claims being so nearly balanced, I have tried a little plot to make them draw each other's portraits for my guidance.

HAWK. A plot?

POP. But for which I should never have known, Captain, that you tricked me into buying your broken-down hacks, and said I shouldn't know a horse from a bullock, but for the horns.

HAWK. (*starting up*) I repudiate the horns—they were added by Sir Jacob Malmsey.

SIR J. (*starting up*) By me, sir?

HAWK. By you, sir! I heard you; I was in an alcove in the Yew-Tree Walk.

SIR J. And I heard you, sir! I was on the other side of the hedge, and you called me an oily-tongued old hypocrite.

FLAP. (*starting up*) Well, that's not worse than calling me a toady.

POP. Or saying there wasn't a greater rogue unhanged than your friend, the Captain.

HAWK. Flapper, you scoundrel!

MRS. M. (*and* LADIES *rise in alarm*) Gentlemen—gentlemen, pray remember there are ladies present—Sir Jacob!

SIR J. Don't address yourself to me, madam—a woman who could scandalize her friends as you have done, is—— I won't say what.

MRS. M. Upon my word, Sir Jacob——

POP. It's useless to deny it—they heard every word you said about them.

MISS N. Yes, ma'am; and the spiteful old maid, Miss Nettley, begs to say she shan't forget your kind mention of her. (*curtsies to* MRS. MARTINGALE)

MRS. B. Mr. Popples, have you repeated what I said?

POP. Not a syllable, Mrs. Beamish; but if ladies will tell droll stories about kid gloves and wigs——

MRS. M. It's an abominable invention; but what can be expected from such a source. (*looking sternly at* MRS. BEAMISH)

MRS. B. Oh, pray protect me, Mr. Popples! (*placing her hand on his arm*)

POP. Don't come too near me. Are you not aware that you are a fascinating boa constrictor?

HAWK. Come, let's have no quarrelling;—it seems that Popples has laid a trap for us and treated us all very badly.

MRS. B. Shockingly! He has betrayed our unsuspecting confidence.

SIR. J. Endeavoured to sow dissention among friends.

MRS. M. And disturb the harmony of a happy circle.

SIR J. It's perfectly revolting; such conduct would destroy the closest friendships.

MRS. B. And break the bonds of all civilized society.

POP. Good Heavens!

HAWK. What would be the consequence if we were to know all that our friends say of us?

POP. Dreadful, no doubt.

MISS N. Shocking!

MRS. B. Frightful!

SIR J. I shall quit your house immediately, Mr. Popples. (*the other friends except* SKRYMSHER *and* VENEER *exclaim* "And I.")

Enter MRS. POPPLES, R. U. E., *she remains up the stage listening.*

HAWK. We'll all go. Flapper, order my phæton. (*crosses to* POPPLES) Popples, never again call me friend. (*half aside to* POPPLES) But if you want the pair of duns, you shall have them for three hundred. (*they are going*, L. C.)

VENEER. (*crosses to* HAWK) Stay—what the deuce does it mean? Where are you going? (*turns to* POPPLES) My dear Popples, what has happened? If any little misunderstanding has arisen it may be explained. Come—as your friend, you must permit me to interfere.

POP. Oh! as my friend?

VENEER. Yes, I flatter myself I am your friend.

MRS. P (*coming down*, R. C.) Certainly; if insidious endeavours to estrange the affections of a wife from her husband gives a claim to the title, I can answer that Mr. Veneer is your friend.

POP. There, what do you think of that? it's a candid confession, eh?

VENEER. Mrs. Popples, I hope—a—— (*aside*) The woman's mad!

MISS N. (*apart to the* FRIENDS) We must not go yet—this is so very interesting.

POP. (*to* VENEER) You hear what Mrs. Popples says; have you no reply, my good friend?

VENEER. Why, a—really, sir—your prejudices are so very strong, and the lady labours under so strange a misconception—that—a—I think it may be better to—— (*voice in room*, R., *cries* "Mamma!")

POP. (*aside*) Bless me! some one has set the doll a-going.

MRS. B. Is not that a child's voice? (*voice again calls* "Mamma!" "Mamma!")

MRS. M. Yes, in that room.

POP. (*agitated*) No, no—it's a mistake; there's no child. (*aside*) I forgot the key in the door—(*voice calls* "Mamma!")—and somebody has got into the room. Nothing of the sort, I say.

FRIENDS. Ha, ha, ha! (*voice in room* "Mamma!")

FLAP. I'm certain I heard it.

MRS. M. We all heard it. (*voice in room* "Mamma!")

FLAP. There! shall I go and see?

POP. (*seizing him*) Not for your life! 'Tis nothing but a—— Oh, dear!

MRS. P. (*apart to* POPPLES) Oh, Popples! have I deserved this?

POP. Don't! I'm the unhappy victim of appearances—a lamb is not more innocent!

OMNES. O-oh, o-oh, oh! Ha, ha!

Mrs. P. (*aside*) Unworthy as he is of my affection, I cannot bear that he should be exposed to the scorn or ridicule of these people. (*to the* Friends) My good friends, this is a matter which concerns me more nearly than any other person, and when I say that I am perfectly satisfied with my husband's conduct, I hope you will give yourselves no further trouble about it.

Pop. (*apart to* Mrs. Popple) Polly, you are an angel.

Hawk. Certainly; if you're satisfied, Mrs. Popples.

Miss N. Look—look!

Miss Daw *enters from the room,* R., *down* R. *of* Popples, *carrying a large doll in her arms.*

Pop. There,—the murder's out.

Mrs. M. A beautiful babe!

Ladies. A babe?

Skrym. Ha, ha, ha! Why 'tis nothing but a doll. (*takes doll from* Miss Daw) A speaking doll.

Pop. And I'm not ashamed to say I made it.

Mrs. B. You, Mr. Popples?

Pop. Nobody else, ma'am. Before I became a gentleman, I was a respectable doll maker.

Friends. A doll maker?

Pop. In the honest pride of my art, I confess it.

Mrs. B. Your art!—a doll maker's art!—ha, ha, ha! (*the other* Friends *laugh with her*)

Pop. Aye, and there are many worst arts in the world than doll making; but my wife could not bear it—so I was obliged to work unknown to her and everybody else in yonder room—making my model doll. Beautiful creature! (Miss Daw *having taken doll, moves towards* R. D.) It's as near human nature as paint and springs and curls can make it. (*the doll crys,* "Mamma," *at* R. D.) There's a voice for you,—there's a plaintive appeal to maternal affections.

Mrs. P. I deserve your reproaches for my suspicions and my folly. My love of pleasure, and perhaps a little of woman's vanity, made me, for a time, indifferent to your wishes; but I have suffered deeply for it, and I now entreat your pardon for my fault.

Mrs. B. (*aside to* Ladies) Poor-spirited creature!

Pop. (*aside*) She looks all innocence; but the miniature—the miniature! Polly, one doubt lies at my heart, remove it and all shall be forgotten. (*produces the miniature*) This miniature, you know it.

Mrs. P. Ah! then it was you who purloined it from the drawer of my work table—I missed it this morning——

Pop. Missed it! For whom then did you intend it?

Mrs. P. Would you know? Press that spring at the side, and you may satisfy yourself.

Pop. (*touches the spring, the back of the miniature flies open*) Ah, here's something engraved inside. (*reads*) "To my beloved husband, on the anniversary of our marriage—September, 1st, 1855." This very day! and the miniature was——

Mrs. P. A gift that I meant to surprise you with.

Pop. Oh, Polly, you have lifted a mountain from my heart. How

could I doubt you for a moment? Come to my arms, Polly, and tell me you forgive me.

MRS. P. From my heart—from my heart! (*rushes to his arms*)

POP. There, there—it's too much—too much. (*they go up the stage together*)

SKRYM. There's a picture!

MRS. B. I can't endure these matrimonial peace-makings—they're positively nauseous!

SKRYM. Sour grapes—sour grapes!

POP. (*coming down with* MRS. POPPLES) It's all settled, Sam—we'll quit this grand villa, and take a little cottage at Highgate.

LADIES. Highgate! Shocking!

POP. I thought you would not like it; but for all that, we may hope for a few friends at our Sunday's dinner. The old dish, Sam—boiled leg of mutton and turnips.

SKRYM. That's right. (*crosses to* C.) Give me both your hands. (*grasps their hands*) Hah, that's an honest grasp! I feel your hearts in 'em now. God bless you. Ha, ha, ha! what's the matter with my eyes? (*wipes his eyes*)

HAWK. I say, Veneer, hadn't we better go?

VENEER. Certainly. (*crosses to* MRS. BEAMISH) Shall I have the honour of conducting you to your carriage, Mrs. Beamish? (*she takes his arm*)

SIR J. The idea of dining off leg of mutton and turnips.

FLAP. Well, I'm rather partial to mutton and turnips—that's the truth.

POP. What's that you say about truth, Mr. Flapper? (*comes forward*)

Truth, as the proverb says, lies in a well.
But where on earth does real friendship dwell?

HAWK. At Tattersall's.
VENEER. In Paris.
MRS. B. At a ball.
MRS. M. At whist.
SIR J. No—at a dinner.
MISS N. Not at all.
True friendship's only known——
SKRYM. In Lincolnshire.
MISS D. If I might be allowed to interfere,
And humbly to suggest——
FLAP. My dear Miss Daw,
Can I assist you?
HAWK. No, you may withdraw.
MRS. P. Friendship's still ready when the drama calls,
Her kind supporters to these ancient walls;
With gen'rous fervour, helps the good old cause,
Cheers our lov'd labours by her frank applause.
POP. And makes me feel, whatever fortune sends,
That here I am, a "MAN OF MANY FRIENDS."

MISS N. SIR J. MISS D. HAWK. VENEER. MRS. B. FLAP. MRS. M. SKRYM. POP. MRS. P.

Curtain.

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Coyne, Joseph Stirling
The man of many friends

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